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THE ALL-INDIA VILLAGE INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

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STONE WALLS AND IRON BARS

BY

J. C. KUMARAPPA

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MAGANVADI

WARDHA (C. P.)

1949

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Biographical Sketch of the Author

One of the Indian Christians who gave up a lucrative Practice as an Auditor to join the Gandhian Ashram at Sabarmati. He is the well known Organiser and President of the All India Village Industries Association, which is an attempt to handle the economic side of the struggle to establish the Swaraj of the Masses or Ramraj.

Sjt J. C. Kumarappa, M. A. (Columbia), B. Sc., (Syracuse), F. S. A. A. (London) was born on 4th January, 1892 at Tanjore. His boyhood was spent in Madras and he was educated at the Doveton College, Madras; Syracuse University, New York; Columbia University, New York; and served his articles as an Incorporated Accountant in London till 1919 and set up in Practice as an Auditor in Bombay till 1929 when he joined Gandhiji......and began going to jail!

He carried an economic survey of about 50 villages of Matar Taluka in 1929, while he was a Professor of Economics in Gujarath Vidyapith, and was in editorial charge of the *Young India* in 1930. He was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in 1931. He served as convener of the Congress Select Committee which enquired into the Financial Obligations between Great Britain and India. Towards the end of 1931, he was placed again in editorial charge of *Young India*. The years 1932 and 1933 were spent in prison. In 1934 he worked on the Managing Committee of the Bihar Central Relief Committee until the formation of the All India Village Industries Association towards the end of the year. He is now the Organizer and President of the All India Village Industries Association.

From 1939-41 he was Chairman of The Industrial Survey Committee of the Government of the Central Provinces and Berar, which carried out a survey of over 600 villages and its report has been published in 5 volumes. In 1942 he was detained. At the end of 1943 he was convicted and sentenced for two years for an article criticising the Government for their policy of inflation. He served as the Chairman of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee in 1948-49.

He is the author of (1) Survey of Matar Taluka, (2) Public Finance and our Poverty, (3) Organization and Accounts of Relief Work, (4) Philosophy of Work, (5) Why the Village Movement (6) Practice and Precepts of Jesus, (7) Christianity—Its Economy and Way of Life, (8) Currency Inflation—Its Cause and Cure, (9) The Economy of Permanence, (10) An Overall Plan for Rural Development(11) Clive to Keynes, (12) Gandhian Economy and other Essays etc.; and has contributed numerous articles to periodicals.

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STONE WALLS AND IRON BARS

In the very outset I have to explain that I am not a politician in any sense of the term. My one and only interest in public life has been to see social justice meted out to the helpless. If frequently Government had found it necessary to incarcerate me, it had always been for my placing before the public the misdeeds of those entrusted with the welfare of the dumb millions and never for any over-act of civil disobedience on my part from any political motives. I have always deemed it my duty as a citizen to point out malpractices resulting in the suffering of the people. Naturally a Government, conceived in avarice from the early days of the East India Company, fattened on the loot of its many agents and servants, and clothed in falsehood, hates to have its nefarious activities exposed to the limelight of public opinion.

I began to take interest in public life towards the latter end of 1929 and about the middle of 1930, I found myself in charge of "Young India" after Gandhiji's incarceration. Through its columns I had to ventilate the grievances of the public on which the enraged government, run amuck, was wreaking its vengeance by all manner of cruelties and tortures. It was not long before I was served with a notice to be of "good behaviour" and ordered to enter into a bond to that end. The resulting prosecution ended with a sentence of one year's imprisonment. Since then, willy nilly,

I have been a constant patron of his Majesty's guest houses. The last conviction was for two years rigorous imprisonment for an article in the Gram Udyog Patrika, the Official Organ of the All India Village Industries Association, entitled "*Stone for Bread*" exposing the inflationary activities of the Reserve Bank and warning the public in 1942 of an approaching famine, because of the Government sending out food stuffs out of the country.

Within the short period of about 15 years of public life, I have spent over a year as a detenue and have been convicted to over $6\frac{1}{2}$ years of hard labour. Similarly, with many of us over 50% of our public life is spent behind bars and therefore, this aspect of our existence demands a larger share of attention than is usually given to it. Hence, I welcomed the idea of a symposium on this subject. I am penning these lines, not with the intent of attacking the jail department but to see how we can contribute towards its reconstruction. I have been in jails at Ahmedabad, Sabarmati, Nasik, Bombay, Wardha, Nagpur and Jubbulpore under varying conditions of existence.

The Initiation:

As mentioned above my first case was to show cause why I should not be required to enter into a bond for a year to be of good behaviour. The trying Magistrate was personally a good, national minded man, but he was part of a huge soulless machine. When I made my statement to the court he sat with

his head down supported on his hand. People in the court remarked that he looked the accused in the court and I the presiding Judge pronouncing judgment. The court room was packed to capacity and the case was over by 3 P. M. The jail van was expected at 5. 30 P. M. at the rising of the court. Usually the convicts are sent off to the judicial lock ups. But my Magistrate was too humane for that. He sent me into his own chambers and asked me to rest, in the meanwhile he had ordered tea for me. He had counted without the host. There were a large number of persons to see me off. They also crowded into the Magistrate's chambers. The Magistrate rose to the occasion and sent out for light refreshments and tea for all. Then with the arrival of the jail van, garlands, Kumkum boxes etc. with the accompanying ceremonies were in evidence; and I was hurried away to another stage and another scene where persons do not count excepting as animals. My first cell was one just vacated by Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel, who had kindly left his deck chair for me. I was initiated into jail life by Sjt. Devidas Gandhi who was my neighbour in the barrack.

But all Magistrates are not capable of rising to the need of the occasion. Some retain a modicum of the human nature they were born with, but alas, most get hardened into unfeeling machines in course of time.

Jail life is not a uniform existence. There are all stages of inhumanities. The only features that are common are the privation of freedom and the atmosphere of suspicion which are nerve-racking.

Buildings:

I have been lodged in private bungalows converted into prisons, by having their windows and doors strengthened and barred and their compound walls barb-wired. As these were overflow camps the accommodation was anything but adequate. I was in a room about 25 by 10 sharing it with about 20 others. We had hardly enough room to lie down in a row. We were taken out in the morning for about 20 minutes to answer calls of nature, have our bath and exercise. I have been in lock-ups and cells barely 20 feet square, where about two dozen people are lodged from morning till evining, without any facilities of lying down or sitting, with a common urinal in a corner of the room. The smells can hardly be even imagined.

I have been kept in single cell barracks with adequate exercising grounds but without a green blade of grass to be seen.

Some jails were well built with stone floors, flush latrines and chlorinated water supply, with single individual cells with electric lights.

I spent nearly a year with a whole barrack of six cells, to myself. This was meant for Europeans and so was well equipped with bath room, lavatories, tables, chairs, iron beds and even an electric fan in summer, and a large flower garden. Yet jail is a jail. It is the deprivation of the freedom that crushes the human being.

Food :

The jail diet is academically a balanced diet. It may be even scientifically so, but the psychological factor makes it biologically inadequate. Nobody can do anything about it. Man does not live by bread alone. There is something else that is necessary. This something else cannot be meted out in terms of tolas and ounces. It is a part of the very being of man. Without that he fades away. I have had all kinds of food at various places; some good, some bad, some with plenty of grit in it, some cooked and served well. In one jail, on medical ground, I was given anything I needed in raw form leaving the cooking to me. I computed that my stores alone including milk, sugar, fruits, vegetables, butter, bread etc. cost about Rs. 45 to 50 a month for me in that jail. Yet I suffered from what appeared like malnutrition. It went to such a stage that the doctors despaired. Fearing the heart may stop any moment, on the recommendation of their own doctors, the Government released me thinking I was on my death bed. Private doctors outside thought it was not malnutrition but Psychosis. Whatever it was, in three or four days after my release I was up and about, though weak and unsteady on my legs.

Work, Books and Recreation :

All my sentences have been rigorous. Hence, I have had to work on tape making, flour grinding, cleaning vegetables, rope making, spinning, etc. The

work itself may not be hard enough to break one, but the fact of having to work uuder the supervision of warders and having to account to others for the day's work, is in itself a humiliating experience which needs to be gone through personally to understand its reaction on one.

A few religious books are allowed and one or two antiquated reading books. Here again my experience has been varied. In one jail, my next cell was a veritable modern book store containing the very latest publications. Yet in other places I was left with my Bible and such other hoary and respectable pubications. Newspapers with conservative outlook such as the Times, the States man, the Hindu etc. which were innocuous, were freely allowed to be shared by a group, but no really progressive journal, which was critical of the present day, was countenenced. In one jail, even my own publications were not allowed to me. Lest I should seduce my self.

In the larger jails some recreations were provided for but the equipment was as a rule below par.

Strange Bed Fellows :

In the improvised jails I have had snakes and scorpions as bed fellows coming in to share the warmth of my bed. We had to sleep on the floor and there was hardly any plinth, so serpents and frogs got in to share our humble lives. On the last

occasion I reared three kittens—black, grey and white–to enliven my spare moments.

Companions in distress :

Again, as in all other departments of jail life., I have had a variety in my jail companions—erudite scholars, versatile talkers, voracious readers, and laborious idlers, idealists, criminals, financial crooks, sadists and anti-social creatures, rich men, Robbin-hoods and paupers, Europeans, Chinese and Negroes, in fact one comes in contact in a jail with all sorts and conditions of men. At one end I have been for months on end with men like Sjt. Bhulabhai Desai, Mangaldas Pakwasa and Shoorji Vallabhdas and at the other end with life convicts and murderers. All this heterogenous company serves to make up for the lack of contacts out side. In our humdrum life, the routine of our day, hardly brings us into such a kaleidoscopic variety of humanity. This helps us to understand the multifarious facets of life this world presents. But for the fortuitous circumstances that launch us periodically into jails, many of us will go through life, with just a narrow outlook on the lives our fellow-beings lead. Adversity brings us closely together and we begin to see in people, we would ordinarily keep away from, some traces of goodness we would not credit them with. Some of the criminals, hardened by circumstances into their anti-social activities, were veritable geniuses gone astray. The calibre of a few leaders of gangs of

dacoits I met made me think that if they had been properly handled in earlier life they would have been our national leaders. They possessed an amount of magnetism that many a so called political leader may well envy. Their clear thinking and basic understanding of men and matters will put to shade many a university Professor. Such are their great qualities that have made them leaders, though in the under ground world. What a loss to humanity! Can these direlicts not be salvaged ?

The Bosses :

Even in the jail we have a hierarchy of men. From amongst the criminals the night watch-man, gang foreman and convict warders or overseers are chosen. Then come the paid warders, babus, assistant jailors, juniors, junior jailors, deputy jailors and the the senior jailor. The whole order is presided over by the all mighty Superintendent, whose word is law within the four walls of the Prison. Here again one meets with all types of human specimens. Generally speaking the recruitment is from the lower strata of never-do-wells in society. "Set a thief to catch a thief" may appear to be the motto of those who engage these men for the jail staff. we may well say that a jailor is a criminal type that has not yet been caught under the clutches of the law; for in the moral tone there is not much choice between the jailor and the convicts, the only difference is the former is paid by the administration and the latter is maintained

by the administration. An exceptional few may have drifted into this department from a respectable home due to adversity, but it does not take long to get dabbed with the same brush of tar as the others, especially if he wants to get on in the department. Many a murder has been committed within the four walls of the prison but rarely it is that it comes to light, and even so only in rare cases a few jailors are brought to book but are let off lightly, with a few years imprisonment,

The jailors are becoming a rising community, a veritable caste with vested interests handed down from father to son. Frequenty, I have met the third generation of jailors.

As a rule the Superintendent is a medical man whose knowledge of medicine has faded into just a rumour and his skill will not justify a dead mouse being committed to his charge. These be the gods that reign supreme in jails over lives of thousands of unhappy citizens!

The Denizens:

The Law is well termed an ass. It consigns good respectable citizens to live in close proximity to influences that make for evil. Most criminals are made in jails. I have come across scores of innocent young men and boys of immature age, who have been landed in jail on petty charges, perhaps often false, and put up by policemen anxious to get their promotions, or on failure to get satisfactory illegal gratuity, or for revenge either on their own

feud or paid for by some enemy. Some convicts have confessed to having plucked ears of corn in neighbouring fields to appease the hunger of their children when employment was not forthcoming. During the days of food scarcity one family was finding it difficult even to get oil cakes that are fed ordinarily to cattle or used as manure. When their condition was desperate this man plucked a *paylie* of jowar from a field to keep his starving children from death and he got three months rigorous imprisonment for it. At that time many jails were filled with such cases. (The Wardha Sub-Jail, where the normal capacity is for about 80 inmates, had over 550 on the lock up lists in those days. The condition of sanitation and supply of water can well be imagined under such a state of overcrowding.) Such innocent children of misfortune often leave their jails as bosom companions of hardened and seasoned convicts, from where they have imbibed the trade secrets of the underground world and quickly chose the easy path to acquire purchasing power from others, especially if their mentors happen to be men of personality as most dacoits are.

A few of the convicts are brought in under the vagrancy acts. Their histories are not very different from the unhappy victim described above. With the outside police, the mere fact of a man belonging to a so called criminal tribe is sufficient evidence to book him, and once a convict always a convict, because he is ever afterwards on the police list and the trying Magistrate's presumption is always against him.

A goodly proportion of the inmates of a prison will be classed mental defectives under modern criterions of criminology. These unfortunates are battered about and brow-beaten by the sadist group of jailors. One young assistant jailor, who was a third generation jailor, boasted to me that when a convict who attempted to run away, was caught and put into fetters he had the time of his life caning him. He said, "Oh, I beat so that my hands are still aching". He was too immature to keep his sadist pleasure to himself and too inexperienced to know that he should not speak of such illegal acts. The man, who was beaten, in this case was a hefty fellow, who could have knocked this young jailor dead with one blow if he were free and outside the jail. I told him there would be time enough to brag if he had met his victim outside on a free bout but it was rank cowardice to hit a man in fetters held down by half a dozen warders.

The truely anti-social, hardened criminals will be found to be a very small percentage and even their history, if traced properly, will show that they have been manoeuvred into the position by unforeseen calamities or social conditions.

During the political upheavals we get a wave of educated political prisoners, often belonging to a social strata and moral training and tradition well above that of the Suprintendent himself. They come in like the fresh tide waters to wash the foul drains of a city. Their presence, though for a while only,

checks the rot and to a certain extent tones up the administration, though the powers that be may resent this influence.

The Atmosphere:

The moral air that one breathes in a jail is foul with suspicion and hatred. Every word that is spoken, from the Superintendent down to the meanest warder, has to be carefully weighed to know if there is any modicum of truth in it. There is no love lost between the criminals and jail authorities.

The Bench:

The doors of the prison are situated in the Law Courts, and those who preside there help to people this unfortunate city of nightmares. The Magistrates are lawyers ill-equipped to deal with social diseases. They work on a wooden mould often under the pressure of the police, who are eager to obtain conviction. These struggling Magistrates are under the thumb of the head of the District and are easily amenable to his directions. His own despatch of work often weighs more than the dictates of justice. It is true there are safeguards in the form of appeals to higher courts. But how many of these petty cases can go up to the independent tribunals? Many a political case has proved that even these higher tribunals are subject to the influence of the administrative government departments. Where then shall we turn for justice?

My Last Release:

I began with an account of how I entered jail for the first time. I may be permitted to mention how I left jail on the last occasion. I have already referred to the weak state I was reduced to under the paragraph on food. My face, hands and feet were swollen and turned bluish in colour. I had left instructions in a sealed envelope for the Superintendent directing him how to dispose of my body and personal effects if anything happened to me. The government wired to my people at Madras to proceed to Jubbulpore if they wished to see me as my pulse was becoming feeble. Immediately two of my elder sisters started for Jubbulpore after re-wiring the contents of the Government telegram to Gandhiji. My eldest sister's nerves gave way by the time she reached Nagpur and she developed stomach complaint, so she could not go any further but deputed her son to join my other sister, who, having been a medical woman in practice in her younger days, was able to stand the strain better. They knew none in Jubbulpore but an old medical college mate of my sister's was working in his professional capacity in the Ordnance Department. She telegraphed to him that she was coming and will put up with him. (We may for our purpose refer to him as "Doctor Moses"). He wes a Captain by rank and an Indian Christian from Madras. My sister and nephew went to him and put up there and came to the jail the next morning in fear and trembling as to whether they would be given my ashes, body

or meet me in flesh and blood, They met the Superintendent coming into the office at the entrance and requested for an interview. The Superintendent informed them that he had received orders from the Government just then to release me and that I would be out in an hour. My sister went quickly back to her house to fetch a car as she was warned I was not fit to sit up in a tonga or travel by train. Captain Moses was not at home but his kindly and simple wife readily gave the car and got a bed ready. The Superintendent had given orders to the jailor that I should be brought out very carefully as he did not want anything untoward to happen between the cell and the jail gate. My sister received me and took me to her host's bungalow where I was resting when Captain Moses arrived and heard of what had happened from his wife. The fear of the Gadarenes possessed him. He came to my sister and whispered that he may lose his job if I was kept in the house. I enquired what was going on. As soon as I was told, I sat up in bed and was getting up to walk out. I did not wish to stand in the way of any one's worldly advancement. My sister said to me "Be reasonable. Where can you go ?" I replied "This one thing I know. I must leave this house immediately. What I do afterwards is another question which we shall decide later on." While we were yet speaking, three men, dressed in spotless white and in Gandhi caps, arrived as though angels sent from heaven asking if I was in that house and if so they wished to see me at once.

as Captain Moses rushed in to my sister with "You see they have already started to come in. My car number must' have been noted by the police at the jail, and now a stream of Congressmen will start to come to my house." I replied "Do not fear. I am leaving immediately." These visitors were from the local Khadi Bhandar and having heard that I was released they had called.

Helped or partly carried by two of them I got into their tonga but where to go we did not know. As there was no room in the tonga my sister could not accompany me. She stared at me with moistened eyes not knowing what to do in the predicament. As we were going along our friends told me of Dr. George D' Silva, one old and experienced medical practitioner, who was very sympathetic and suggested I see him first. So we made for his residence. He had not much room in his flat of two rooms which he shared with two grown up sons. He slept in the front verandah. He put me in his bed and examined me. He found nothing wrong with me organically. He sat on my bed and regaled me with anecdotes of his school boy escapades and made me laugh my inside out. He said "You have got musty in the stale life of jail. You will be all right." In the meanwhile, some students of the Leonard Theological College, who had attended a conference in 1942 which I had addressed before my incarceration, having heard I had been relesed, came to Dr. D' Silva to enquire of my whereabouts. I told them I had no "Whereabouts" just then, and they kindly

took me to the college guest house and sent a messenger to Dr. Moses to inform my sister that she too could stay at the guest house. These students too appeared to have been sent from heaven to minister to my needs. I thankfully accepted their kind offer. To the surprise of every one, the doctor included, I recovered sufficient strength in a few days to travel back to Wardha in stages.

The Cause:

Our experience related in the paragraphs above shows how far from satisfacory is the condition in Jails. We cannot proceed to rectify every pin prick. The state of affairs calls for radical treatment. We should first be certain of the cause; then the remedy will suggest itself, if our diagnosis is right. From the wide range picture drawn above, it is clear that the whole department is based on wrong notions. The philosophy behind it is based on antiquated theories of crime and its treatment. Society seeks to revenge itself on those whom it considers are working against its well-being. The whole organisation is set to punish the offender. This attitude runs through the entire system, including the judiciary. We can now understand why the welfare of the prisoner is the last concern of the authorities. They are not out to serve him. They are there to tease and torture him. And how well they do their job!

The criminal code and the punishments prescribed thereunder follow a philosophy of life based on the sacredness of private property and the idea of work as an evil to be abhorred. Indeed work is looked upon

as a curse. "With the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread" is the conception behind it. Therefore work is given as a punishment and naturally the convicts, in their turn, try to avoid it. This theory had led to slavery and has caused much of the misery in the present day economic world. It is the fountain of empires and prime cause of violence. We have to root it out.

The Remedy

What should our approach be? We have to overhaul the organisation, nay, we shall have to pull the whole structure down and rebuild it on new foundations. No tinkering with a repair scheme will answer.

We have to start with our social philosophy. What is that which makes a man commit a crime? If we can ascertain that, then we have to tackle that root cause of evil.

There may be many causes of crime; economic causes, mental deficiency, moral turpitude, momentary loss of self-control caused by emotions etc. In all cases the root has to be traced and dealt with individually and not *en masse* through codified laws with set punishments.

To start with, Law has to be humanised and separated completely from the Administration. The Magistrates should qualify in social sciences and mental diseases and be as sympathetic professional men dealing with their patients and not heartlese machines doling

out punishment. They should prescribe what would be a treatment to cure every particular case. They should study the members of society brought before them, charged with certain symptoms deviating from the normal expected behaviour and get to the root cause of each. Once the cause is known the remedy in each individuals' case is easily applied.

Mammon should be dethroned. Material wealth has value only in so far as it brings satisfaction to human beings. To safeguard material possessions, human beings should not be made miserable in the process. The curse on work should be lifted and a philosophy of work, which interprets it as a necessary outlet for our creative faculties should be popularised. It may be here mentioned that the theory of Basic Education is founded on this philosophy. The creative element in work is yoked to education. When this is done the work prescribed by a Magistrate would be calculated to educate and develop the subnormal persons placed before him.

If the cause is extreme poverty, then, if the individual is an unskilled person, he should be set to work on some line of occupation which he can follow after his training. At present jail labour is purely based on making work. Persons are asked to sort out the brown wool from white one day. This sorted wool is taken away and again mixed up and given the next day to be sorted out again. The jail industry of weaving carpets, cloths etc. is generally given out to get certain materials produced for the jail and not with the idea of training the prisoner for any gainful occupation.

The Magistrates should be chosen, not for their knowledge of law, nor by priority, but for their deep and sympathetic understnading of men. The Magistrate should be able to classify the accused persons into different categories according to their natural make up. Some may have a routine mind which cannot be put to any creative work, others may need sedentary work, who cannot be put to active physical labours and so on. The work prescribed should be such as to grip the interest of the worker. According to the classification of the Magistrate the accused persons should be placed in different institutions, some in special technological institutions, some in workshops meant for training such individuals, some in largescale factories run for the purpose, others in mental hospitals where psychologists will deal will their charges as patients needing sympathetic and tender care. Only those of a desperate and hardened anti-social character will be sent to segregation camps.

Of course, the politicals cannot be brought under any of these classifications, they being normal persons with definite opinions for which they are willing to make any sacrifices. They should be maintained as a separate colony by themselves as long as the general body of society is not willing to give currency to their ideas. They should be allowed to choose the way they wish to occupy their time and all facilities of common citizenship should be extended to them with the exception of free movement outside the prescribed area. Preferably an island colony, where even the unsightly

jail walls can be avoided, be formed with conveniences of interviews with visitors.

The Staff of the Department

The recruitment for this department should be from individuals who have highly specialised in a course of Sociology, humanites and mental diseases for at least five years on a university level. The office, corresponding to that of a Superintendent, should only be given to men with the above mentioned basic qualification with a service of at least ten years and not below the age of 40 years. The senior and junior jailors will have undergone the same training, though not of a first class rank and of that rich experience. Even the lower order, who do not rank as officers, should have undergone a course of at least three years.

When we have such men in these departments, which should really be nation building departments, the relationship between the authorities and their wards will be similar to that between a Guru and a Shisya, or a physician and his patient, or a master-work-man and his apprentice. It will be characterised by cordiality, even friendship or affection. When the wards have such institutions they would look back on them with the same esteem as the allumni on their old college or university.

At present the jail department is wasteful of human faculties, is a hotbed of crime and breeder of hardened criminals. Our attempt should be to transform this into a national constructive department which will

enrich the national life by cutting brilliant diamonds out of crude stones. It is not useful to reform the present jails, as what is wrong with them is fundamental. No patch-work will mend matters. We have to scrap the present institutions and uproot them from the very foundations and bring into operation a new outlook and philosophy which will settle all details and place them in alignment with the attainment of its goal.

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